

Castlemaine Naturalist

Non members
40c

July 1997
Vol. 21.6 #235

Seabirding off Portland

In the pre-dawn in mid June some rather subdued people gathered on the wharf at Portland. The prospect of being out of sight of land in the Southern Ocean, clinging to a pitching, yawing trawler all day, soaked by spray, fighting sea sickness, just to sight oceanic and sub-antarctic birds is not everyone's idea of pleasure, but, as the man said, "going on pelagic trips is a wet, cold, miserable, nauseating, frustrating exhausting, boring job, but somebody has to do it!"

Dressed in goodness knows how many layers of clothes with waterproofs outermost, we lumped our cameras, binocs and lunch (what hope!) aboard the 40 footer, "Michael J. IV" and skipper John nosed her out towards the harbour entrance. We were now committed. Mike Carter, leader and organiser, had checked and rechecked the weather and the window of opportunity was open for just a day. The gales of yesterday and before were past, the high was coming in fast, the isobars widening. Clearing cloud, winds easing to 10 knots and a mild day was forecast. This was too good to miss and we were off to see how many Albatrosses, Petrels, Prions Shearwaters, Gannets, Skuas and creatures of the deep we could find. Identifying these fast moving, cryptic coloured birds skimming along the waves from a field guide while on an unsteady boat is not easy, and that is why it is best done with experts who can name the species appearing on the horizon and spell out features and characteristics as the birds home in on the boat, looking for fish bait.

Rounding Point Danger we looked up at the colony of Australian Gannets on the Lawrence Rocks, 4000 pairs in all. Once in open waters there was very little sea running, true to the forecast, but the long, slow swell rolling in from the west was 3 metres from trough to crest to remind us that this was the Southern Ocean. By 10 o'clock birds were around us as we passed out of sight of land, still heading south-west to the continental shelf where the birds tend to congregate around working trawlers. We met with Fur Seals waving their flippers as they loafed on

the surface, then a pod of Pilot Whales stayed with us and Tuna were seen rocketing out of the water, but it was the birds we had come to see, and they were majestic.

At times I counted rafts of 80+ Albatrosses, made up of four or more species around us as we lay with engine stopped, gently rocking in the swell.

At 2 o'clock we turned for home and I checked my list with our leader; Wandering Albatrosses including the Antipodean race, Black-browed Albatross, Sooty Albatross, Grey-headed Albatross. Then Northern Giant Petrel (pink tipped bill), Southern Giant Petrel (green tipped bill), Great-winged Petrel, Cape Petrel (a beautifully patterned bird); Storm Petrels - White-faced, Grey-backed and Wilson's; Sooty, Short-tailed and Fluttering Shearwaters; Crested and White Terns. Finally on the way back while passing Lawrence Rocks, the Great Southern Skuas were robbing returning Gannets of their fish catch, while a White-breasted Sea-eagle and a Peregrine Falcon kept station.

Hopefully there would be other sightings, such as the Royal Albatross and many more species of Petrels, on other occasions, but it was a start, and even a KFC meal on the way back couldn't spoil the day.

Chris Morris.

A Long Weekend at Home

Instead of "Bird Tripping" away on this June long weekend, Maureen and I stayed home and just did two afternoon trips on the Sunday and Monday in very cold and grey conditions, so we were very pleased to come up with a count of 70 species.

On Sunday we drove from Castlemaine to Yapeen. No sign of the Rose Robin, but we did spot "Margaret's" Little Eagle.

We then followed the Yapeen/Sth Muckleford road where birds were in abundance, including two flocks of Flame Robins with females and juveniles outnumbering the vivid flame breasts. We also had a good clear sighting of the not so common Southern Whiteface.

We then drove to the southern edge of the Muckleford Forest and were rewarded with a pair of Golden Whistlers directly over our heads at one of our stops.

On Monday we explored the Strathlea/Campbelltown road, which produced a variety of honeyeaters and more Flame Robins (on both days the Flame Robins were in the company of Restless Flycatchers). A

Wedgetailed Eagle and Black-shouldered Kites were also noted.

From Campbelltown we headed for Tullaroop reservoir and in a hedgerow of Boxthorns discovered a mixed flock of Greenfinches and Sparrows. This was our first sighting of Greenfinches in the Castlemaine area.

Raptors were in abundance over the plains, especially Kestrels and Brown Falcons (often in conflict). We also had three separate sightings of pairs of Black-shouldered Kites on this stretch.

Tullaroop rewarded us with three varieties of Lorikeets in the one tree - Musk, Little and Purple-crowned - whilst the very low water level of the reservoir added only Yellow Spoonbill, Little Australian Grebe and Musk Ducks to the list.

Despite the bleak afternoons and chilly winds we thoroughly enjoyed the variety of birds in our local habitats.

Ken and Maureen Dredge.

Mount Kooyoora Outing

After phonecalls to the owners of Tang Tang Swamp and the property at Tennyson it was obvious that it wasn't worth going to either place for the June outing. I wasn't sure where to go, but Maggie Oliver suggested Melville Caves as we haven't been there for a while *and* they're to the north! Even the forecast the night before wasn't promising, but the dozen or so people who went had a beautiful day. The weather was fine until we got back near Maldon on the way home, and the morning was mainly sunny. Even the promised south wind didn't get up until after lunch. Quite a number of birds were sighted on the way, including a Swamp Harrier.

On the way into the Park we stopped at Barry Rock which is a hollowed out granite boulder some 5 or 6 m high. When we stopped the cars there was a family of White-browed Babblers cavorting over the rock and amongst the branches of the nearby shrubs.

We got to the car park at about 11.15, and had a cuppa while the others caught up, which was just as well, because another car-load arrived before we were ready to set out. We decided to take the track to the lookout to the south-east of the car park, as several of us had never been there before. There was little in flower except Grey and Harlequin Mistletoes, and Long-leaf box, which is a slightly different form from the Castlemaine area. Ferns, including Blanket Fern and Rock Ferns, which were coming up every where, were also seen.

Quite a number of birds were seen including Grey Shrike-thrushes, White-throated Treecreepers, Yellow-tufted, White-naped, Fuscous, White-plumed and New Holland Honeyeaters, a Mistletoebird, Brown, and Yellow-rumped Thornbills, a female Golden Whistler and Suberb Fairy-wrens. While we were up on the rocks of the lookout someone spotted a pair of Wedgetails soaring nearby. We saw them again later on the other side of the caves. In all 52 different bird species were recorded for the full day.

Back at the car park while we were having lunch a flock of White-winged Choughs flew over and began feeding quite close by, and the inevitable Kookaburra arrived with the smell of barbequed sausages. The Blakely's Red Gums which are all around the area, especially in the car park, were of great interest to some of the group.

After lunch we decided to drive up to the upper car park and walk up to the lookout and cave. There is a track up from the lower car park, too, but that is pretty steep in places. The cave itself is quite dank and dark, and I can't quite work out how Melville could have got his horse in there, but it would have been a good hiding place, nevertheless. Our intrepid Orienteer, Margaret, and Chris decided to walk down to the lower car park and meet us there. We spent some time up the top and finally went down to collect them, but they weren't there. We decided it must have been further than we thought, so we waited; and Broadways set off for home; and we waited - until Broadways arrived back with a couple of lost people they found way down the road! They assured us they weren't very lost as they'd found the track, even if it was a bit far south. (No, we didn't really have to wait very long.)

This area is a fascinating for its flora, and fauna, and also its geology and history. Gilberts Whistler is found here, the Large-leaf Bush-pea *Pultenaea daphnoides* and the Morelle mushroom, to say nothing of a pair of Powerful Owls, lots of wallabies and possums, Wallowa Wattles and thousands of Blunt Greenhoods at the right season. It's well worth another visit sometime, perhaps even another camp-out?

Rita Mills

Swamp Wallabies

Also seen on the track back to the lower car park before lunch was a wallaby or kangaroo which aroused much discussion. She was sitting on a rock not far from our party, and we were able to get a good look at her. Some felt she was too large, too heavy, too shaggy for a wallaby. She wasn't marked the same as the local wallaby, which is the Swamp Wallaby, but the local one is not typical, as it only has some rufous over the shoulders and hips, and has a white tip to the tail. The one at the Koorooya State Park was rather rufous on the chest and belly and

quite rufous between the ears and onto the back of the head, and had distinct black "gloves" and feet. Over the rest she was a dark reddish grey

Red-necked Wallaby? Wallaroo? However a check in the Australian Museum "Complete Book of Australian Mammals", backed with another couple of references, showed that she was a Swamp Wallaby, *Wallabia bicolor*, which is the only representative of the genus. To quote the above reference book - "A combination of genetic, reproductive, dental and behavioral characteristics set the Swamp Wallaby so far apart from other wallabies that it is classified as the sole living member of the genus *Wallabia*. For example, while wallabies in the genus *Macropus* have 16 chromosomes, the Swamp Wallaby has 11 in the male, and 10 in the female."

It lives in forest, woodland and heath, with dense understory for daytime shelter, which the wattles and bracken certainly provide at Koorooya. It is a browser, though it does eat some grass, and is solitary, although a number will sometimes gather together to feed at night. It has a small dumbell or rectangular shaped home range, but it is not territorial. It must have a cast iron constitution, as it can and does eat Bracken fern, which is poisonous to cattle, and Hemlock - and pine seedlings! I have found that it is very partial to Wild Cherries, too.

Rita Mills

REFERENCES

- The Complete Book of Australian Mammals, edited by Ronald Strahan, Publisher Angus and Robertson.
- Encyclopaedia of Australian Animals, Mammals. Ronald Strahan. The Australian Museum. Publisher, Angus and Robertson.
- Australian Mammals, a Field Guide for New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia & Tasmania. Jack Hyett and Noel Shaw. Publisher Nelson.

Observations

- * Stan Bruton reported seeing a Scarlet Robin at Elphinstone.
- * At North Castlemaine Rita Mills saw a Yellow Robin for the first time along the railway track between Nth Castlemaine and Barkers Creek, and on Blakeley Road, a mixed flock of Red Wattlebird, Brown-headed, White-naped and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Sittellas, and a Golden Whistler feeding in a small clump of sappling Red Gums and Grey Box. They later joined a Grey Fantail on the other side of the road.
- * Ern Perkins reported seeing a flock of about 150 White Ibis at the tip. He also reported that Bent Wing Bats have been recorded in the district for the first time.
- * Two Little Long-eared Bats were found roosting behind a cupboard on a verandah at North Castlemaine. Rita Mills.

- * Penny Garnett told seeing of seven kangaroos by the basketball stadium.
- * A kangaroo was also seen in Saint Street, and a Darter at the reservoir at North Harcourt. George Broadway.
- * From Harcourt came a report of a seagull! At Ravenswood the resident Forktailed Kite was seen attacking a smaller bird. Later in the month 3 New Holland Honeyeaters in the Banksia, two Eastern Shrike-tits in the Eucalypt, and a lone White Cockatoo were all around the house in Harcourt. Later in the day three White Cockies were busy eating pine nuts. Brenda Envall.
- * Chris Morris reported that a Square-tailed Kite was seen in Bendigo a few weeks ago. Also more birds are coming through the garden at Little Bendigo than at the same time in other years - three thornbill species, several honeyeaters, Grey Fantails, Willy Wagtails, wrens, Scarlet Robins and a Grey Shrike-thrush, which is new to the garden. There was also a mob of 16 kangaroos nearby.
- * New Holland Honeyeaters are definitely on the "goodies" list in Kennedy Street after they were seen taking aphids from the rose leaves in Barbara Maund's garden.
- * Ern Perkins commented that Cattle Egrets are becoming more common, while White-necked Herons seem to becoming quite scarce.
- * Maureen Dredge was able to report that the still small grevilleas they have planted in their garden are already attracting Eastern Spinebills and New Holland Honeyeaters. Grey Fantails and Rufous Whistlers are using the Tree Lucerne for nesting.
- * Chris Morris commented that at the turnoff just before Mount Franklin he had seen four different honeyeaters in Tree Lucerne there.
- * Kay Turner was sitting in her garden watching two Crimson Rosellas only feet away chewing the tops of her lavender bush! She has also had a Spotted Pardelote industriously and persistently flying from the nearby plum tree to the top of the window - to get spiders? or spider web? Apparantly it isn't attacking its image.

SALT TOLERANCE

Experiments have been carried out by Forestry division of CSIRO, crossing Red Gum, Blue Gum and Flooded Gum to produce a salt tolerant hybrid with good timber properties. It has been named Eucalyptus "xylonova"; xylonova meaning "new wood".

Verbal report, George Broadway

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome to the club to Francis Cincotta and Andy Rigby.

An Invitation

The Castlemaine and Bendigo Field Nats, and the Bendigo Native Plant Group have been sent an invitation from Marilyn Sprague to visit

Goldfields Revegetation at its new 9 acre site in Tannery Lane (the old Cherry Berry Farm) on Sunday 27 July, at 2pm.

The Club will leave 27 Doveton St. at 1.30 sharp, to meet with the others at 2 pm for a full tour of the wildflower farm and nursery, including the seed shed and propagation facilities, which are not normally open to customers.

In the new shop we will see displays on cut flowers, farm forestry and revegetation, as well as plans for further developments. Cups of tea and coffee will follow afterwards (3.30pm)

If you can't make it on the day Marilyn reminds us that the opening hours are 9am to 5pm seven days a week.

FROM THE COMMITTEE

The Club has written to the Premier, Mr Kennet and Chris Morris wrote to the Minister for the Environment, Ms Marie Tehan, expressing our alarm at the abolition of the L.C.C. Replies have been recieved from both.

Mr Kennet has just passed the letter on to Ms Tehan, but she has sent a reply to Chris. The answers have put at rest some concerns. The work and reports concerning the the Box Ironbark Forests will be continue to be considered, (the Arthur Rylah Institute is involved in the study) and the Chairman of the L.C.C. is to be the President of the new committee.

Other matters raise grave concerns. For instance, the talk of "development" of Public Land, which can cover a whole range of contentious issues such as mining.

The Club intends to watch developments closely.

From Curtis's Botanical Magazine Vol. 1, 1787

"Botany is a lasting source of rational amusement, and public utility".

Contributed; Barbara Maund

FORTHCOMING GDT PUBLIC WALK

On Sunday July 20, as part of the Ballarat Winter Festival, an all day walk is being held along the trail from Creswick to Ballarat.

A bus shuffle to Creswick departs Ballarat Railway Station at 8.30am

YOU MUST BOOK IN. To do so, ring Nev. Frazer on (03) 5331 1840
BY JULY 16.

Warm walking clothing, inc. boots, are essential. Carry Lunch. All participants are asked to contribute \$5 towards the cost of the bus.

C.F.N.C. PROGRAMME

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church Hall. The entrance to car park is behind the Art Gallery, Lyttleton Street.

Fri July 11 Nature Video Program 8pm. UCA Manse, between the hall and the church.

Sat July 12 Walk at Daylesford in the Twin Bridges/Tipperary Springs area.

Leader E. Perkins. Leave 27 Doveton St. at 10am. Take a packed lunch

Sun July 27. Goldfields revegetation, Tannery Lane, Bendigo (site of the old Cherry Berry Farm). For details see Invitation inside.

Sat Aug 2 Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Survey. All day outing. Leave 27 Doveton St at 10 am. Take Lunch, etc. Lunch will be at the Red, White and Blue mine if anyone wishes to join the survey for the afternoon. Don't forget your binocs!

Fri Aug 8 Pine Forest Management Speaker is Warwick Williams. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat Aug 9 Moonlight Flat Pine Plantation. Leader R. Mills. Leave CHIRP, 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm.

* Keep in mind that the Spring Midweek outings will commence in September!

Sat Sept 13 Exploring Mt Franklin area. Details to be finalised later.

Fri Oct 10 Plants of the Ballarat District, Pat and Bill Murphy, Ballarat F.N.C. 8pm, UCA hall.

Sun Oct 12 Mt Beckwith. All day excursion. Leaders Pat and Bill Murphy of Ballarat FNC. Meet at Clunes P.O. at 11am. Take lunch, etc.

Wed Oct 15 Working Bee. Cape Broom Pull. Meet at 9 am at the corner of Mary St. and Froomes Rd. Bring thick protective gloves.

Fri Dec 12. Members and visitors night. Start thinking about what you might be able to contribute to the program for our last meeting for the year.

.....

Committee: G. Broadway(Pres.), M. Willis (V.P.), M. Oliver (Sec.), B. Envall (Treas.), C. Morris, K. Turner, R.Mills (P.O. & N/L Ed.), E. Perkins, B. Maund, J. Hewetson, M. Dredge, J. Turnbull.

Meetings:-

General - Second Friday every month (except Jan) at Uniting Church hall, Mostyn St. at 8.00pm.

Business - Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. All Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions 1997 - Ordinary Membership: Single \$16 Family \$24

Pensioner/Student: Single \$12 Family \$18. Supporting \$25

Newsletter posted: Membership + \$6

.....

Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.

P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.